

Paul Vicinus
Before the
Appropriations Committee Hearing
On Governor's Proposed Budget Affecting Education
03 March, 2015

Good Evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Paul Vicinus. I am the Director of Secondary Education for West Hartford Public Schools. I have worked for WHPS for the last 21 years, serving in nearly every role from teacher to central office administrator, and I am proud to represent West Hartford at these proceedings. I am here to express concerns regarding the proposed educational budget in general and shortfalls within Educational Cost Sharing specifically.

The Governor's budget represents the financial framework to support the collective priorities across the full spectrum of services and programs. The overall budget shows needed increases in important areas such as Charter Schools, Magnets, and CT Technical High School System. While these programs are deserving of attention, it is at the expense of other programs and grants that are flat-funded, perpetuating or exacerbating long-standing funding and ultimately educational issues.

Of significant concern is the flat funding of Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) grant. In my school district's 19 year history with this grant, we have seen the gap in our ECS funding grow from 23% to as much as a 72% gap. For West Hartford, this translates into a shortfall of over \$300 million over the full 19 year history and a \$31.9 million shortfall in 2014-15 alone. West Hartford has an excellent reputation as a high performing school district, a reputation built on the quality of our curricular programming and the value the community places on education. In 2000, WH ranked in the top one third of the 169 school districts in per pupil expenditure, but over time and due in part to ECS shortfalls, WH now ranks 125th. Were we to measure the ECS shortfall as a per pupil expense, West Hartford would have the largest gap of any school district in CT. The 2014-15 gap of \$31.9 million converts to a gap of \$3015 per student. The next highest gap is \$2700 per student and averages to about \$1100 per student statewide. On strict dollar

values, our 2014-15 shortfall in ECS funding was the 3rd largest among all towns receiving ECS funding. Only Waterbury and Bridgeport had larger dollar value shortfalls, but received 71% and 83% of their full funded ECS calculations versus WH at 36%. Meanwhile, there are 47 towns who receive more than what the ECS formula would suggest.

West Hartford prides itself on the success of its school system but as a district we cannot sustain the quality of programming our students deserve, – that all students deserve given the financial obstacles of continued and growing ECS shortfalls and other grant reductions or elimination. West Hartford services nearly 10,000 students, 1964 students whose home language is other than English. This 20% of our student body speaks over 70 different languages. Our racial diversity is 39%. We also have great economic diversity with 21% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Finally, we support over 1100 or 11% of our student population within our special education services and programs. We are proud of our history as a high performing district but our demographics demonstrate that we differ from many of the high performing districts with whom we are often compared. We have significant percentages of students with varying needs. We stand ready to support all students across a spectrum of need but the inequitable distribution of ECS funding threatens to undermine our efforts.

I would ask that your review the equity of this budget relative to ECS. Charter schools and magnets represent one means to bring about change in public education. We believe that our public schools have the right formula to support and grow students and enable them to excel. Equitable support for our local programming is all that is necessary.

Thank you,